



Connecting people to the land since 1895

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Testimony of Clare Cain, Trails Director, Connecticut Forest & Park Association

<u>Public Hearing Subject Matter</u>	Support/ Oppose
<i>RAISED HOUSE BILL 5291: "An Act Authorizing Bonding for Bikeways, Greenways, and Recreational Trails"</i>	Strongly Support

Dear Environment Committee,

Beginning with the establishment of the Quinnipiac Trail in 1929, CFPA has managed and maintained Connecticut's Blue-Blazed Hiking Trails (BBHT) system for over 90 years. This immensely popular 825-mile trail network, stretching across 96 Connecticut towns, is truly a significant statewide resource. These trails provide access to some of Connecticut's finest natural spaces, and are accessible from many densely populated regions. In fact, nearly every person in the state lives within 30 minutes of a BBHT.

Maintenance of these trails requires a tremendous amount of resources. Financial support from the Recreational Trails Program (RTP) has helped CFPA leverage member support, volunteer labor, and other grants to extend the benefits of our ongoing work for trail users statewide. RTP funding is foundational to the important work we and other trail managers do.

Current funding from the RTP program supports the following important projects at our organization:

- CFPA's Youth Conservation Trail Crew
- Connecticut Trails Day (largest in the US)
- Trail landowner outreach & trail protection
- Signage, tools, materials & equipment
- DEI Hike Series & trail outreach programs
- Training opportunities for volunteers
- Connecting trails to public transportation
- Maintenance & trail safety

Because of more intense storms fueled by climate change, there is more work than ever to keep trails well-maintained, and trail infrastructure safe. Training volunteers in the safe use of chainsaws to re-open trails after major storm events, re-building bridges that have been swept away in heavy flooding, and repairing eroded trail sections, are now becoming a part of our annual maintenance work.

Connecticut has the largest Trails Day celebration in the nation every year with approximately 250 events and over 5,000 participants. This event is evidence of how much our state loves trails and demonstrates a passion shared by many individuals and organizations who are dedicated to getting people outdoors. The guided events on Trails Day offer families, young people and new recreationalists a safe way to step into the outdoors and experience our open spaces and trails and all the inherently healthy benefits they provide.

With participation in outdoor recreation booming, a trend that has skyrocketed during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is essential that we keep our recreational trails in great shape and continue to promote access to our natural spaces. As the primary source of funding for essential trail work and trail engagement in Connecticut, it is imperative that this Committee support an increase to 6 million in the bonding allotment for the RTP grant program.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Clare Cain".

Clare Cain, Trails Director